BEHIND THE GOP STEERING WHEEL

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Washington

A LEADING figure in the Senate, a Republican who has strongly supported the administration in its foreign policy—one of those conspicuously absent on the new Republican Senate steering committee—was asked by a local newspaperman if the nine-man committee didn't represent a victory for the defeatists. Off the record, replied the Senator, yes; he was absolutely right.

The members, however, demur when asked if this committee, which is to control Republican strategy in the Senate, isn't isolationist—the polite Washington term for advocates of a negotiated peace. They either quibble over terms, saying they are agreed on the "sovereign independence of America," as Sen. C. Wayland (Curley) Brooks put it, or they speak of representing the GOP majority, or being a cross-section.

After four interviews with committee members, and one anonymous interview, I came away convinced that there is no split among its members on the big issues of war and peace. In hating Roosevelt, they are nine hearts that beat as one. In their bitterness towards America's chief allies, they all stew in the same poisonous juice. And in their eagerness to boost prices, they are perfect soul-mates.

Most of the Republicans I tried to see were pretty cordial. Some of them even seemed to feel a certain dare-devil thrill in talking to a NEW MASSES correspondent. But not Sen. Robert A. Taft, the unquestioned boss of the committee and its chairman, who has said publicly that the Moscow Conference did not rule out a negotiated peace, and even that the necessity of our making war on Germany was "debatable." The Senator sent out word by a secretary that he would not see me, that he "was not interested in your magazine." Possibly the Senator read the two articles about him by Bruce Minton that appeared in NEW MASSES last year.

The most solidly defeatist element in the Republican Party has no more outspoken a representative than Brooks, and Brooks, although not exactly happy to see me, soon became lost in his subject. After summing up his position on economic stabilization by saying: "No one can say they're against price control, but they probably feel there are a number of items that controls can come off of (beef should not be rationed, for instance)," he launched into foreign policy. He didn't like the word "isolationist."

"I agree that it's not a good word," I said. "But you wouldn't associate yourself with certain elements that are working for a negotiated peace, would you, Senator?"

"Negotiated peace?" he repeated dreamily, and his round dark eyes shone with a new glitter as he stared at me in his best soiree manner reserved for select Republican women's gatherings in Chicago. He has come a long way in stagecraft since his rough-and-tumble days in the state's attorney's office in Cook County, Ill., where I first knew him—before he prosecuted the case involving the murder of Jake Lingle, a Chicago *Tribune* reporter and underworld figure.

"I don't know," he went on softly, with that rapt look, "and you don't know, little girl, when a negotiated peace move is going to start, or from where. Maybe you'll be surprised how soon it will begin. Maybe it will begin in England—"

"Or in Germany," I said, "as Senator Nye told me a few months ago. He said it would begin in Germany and then be taken up in England, and that as soon as the casualty lists began coming in in this country in large numbers—"

"Well," said Brooks briskly, "if it begins in Germany, it will be for only one reason—that they've had as many casualties as they can stand." He looked up brightly, and went on, with a faint smile, "That's what I say. None of us knows—I don't know what's delaying this invasion—"

"You mean the negotiated peace move may begin before the invasion?"

"I don't know. But lots of people in this country think that we're building up Russia to be a super-colossus. And already she's going behind our back—recognizing governments without letting us know. What is your answer to that? What is your answer?" he demanded belligerently. "And Bessarabia," he went on, "and Latvia. And what about Poland? And Finland?"

"Did you know," I asked, alluding to John Spivak's revelations in NEW MASSES, "that there are well-organized groups, including mothers' organizations and others, that at one time were in the America First organization, which are ready to come out openly for a negotiated peace when enough casualties are reported? Don't you think there's a danger—"

"It depends on what you think is a danger," said Brooks, the vague smile playing about his mouth. "There were a lot of people in America First. When there are two million casualties, the people of this country are going to be asking why." His voice was low and persuasive, his whole air, and his appearance in his natty double-breasted suit that of a salesman selling a woman a life insurance policy. "When there are 400 of our finest men being lost in bombings every night—I don't know the exact figures, but something like that—then people want to know why—"

The telephone rang. It was another committee member, Sen. Kenneth Wherry, Republican whip. They needed Brooks on the floor. All business, but never forgetting his courtesy, he bade me farewell. While none of the others I saw was as frankly interested in a negotiated peace as Brooks, I found the same inference in their talk—that FDR, Churchill, and Stalin were up to nefarious doings, that neither Russia nor England could be trusted, that Roosevelt was fooling the people.

IT WAS odd the way Brooks and others insisted on answers from me, as if just because I worked for NEW MASSES I had to be ready at the drop of a hat to speak with complete authority on all topics. At times they seemed to regard me as a walking delegate for the President, with the latest dope fresh from the White House; at other times I was taken to task personally for what Stalin did or didn't do, at still others complimented on the Red Army, or asked why our State Department did not make it clear what was to happen to the German people—and what was, anyway?

Sen. Styles Bridges of New Hampshire ushered me in smilingly. It was as if he were conscious of his peculiar role in the committee, that of the fair-haired boy in the public eye who was never identified with the defeatist camp. He is the committee's front even more than the new minority leader, the rather timid, soft-spoken Wallace White of Maine, whose voting record Bridges deprecated mildly.

"You certainly couldn't call me an isolationist," Bridges chuckled, stretching a perfectly manicured pink hand toward a handy pile of printed leaflets on his desk entitled, "Voting Record of Senator Bridges on Vital Preparedness Measures Before Congress." He adjusted his snowy pique cuff with its handsome gold link, smiled engagingly and said: "White and I are the exceptions on the committee—though his record isn't the same as mine. Then there are some of the newer members—"

"Like Bushfield?" I asked. Sen. Harlan Bushfield of South Dakota was put on the committee instead of such a man as his colleague, Republican Sen. Chan Gurney, a far westerner who has taken a leading role in supporting the administration's foreign policy and increasingly supports domestic issues linked with the war effort. Bushfield, on the other hand, is serving well the men whose money helped elect

him last year—Lammot du Pont and others of the negotiated peace camp of the National Association of Manufacturers, the Pews, and Colonel McCormick.

Bridges said he didn't want to say anything about the committee as a whole. Foreign policy, he began, was the most important issue facing Congress. And while he was against the President on domestic issues, his own record was clear in supporting him on foreign issues. I knew all about his voting record. I also knew that he was acceptable to Brooks, Taft, Arthur Vandenberg and others on the committee. The fact is that he has come out with increasing brashness as a champion of anti-Soviet forces in the Senate. I asked him about this. In his cultured broad-A accent, redolent of New England, the Senator declared he had said from the beginning—and his fist went down on the desk—that Russia was putting up a marvelous fight, that no matter what our ideological differences, she was our ally. *But*—and here he put forth in slightly milder form the same ideas which Brooks expresses more vulgarly in page after page in the *Congressional Record*—if only the country could be sold on the idea that the postwar agreements, which he said were so needed, were in "our own interests." If only Roosevelt were frank with the people! "We have to live up to our principles as laid down in the Atlantic Charter of protecting the small nations; that's what we're fighting the war for. Take Poland, for instance. . . . Take Finland. . . . Finland kept her obligations to us, and I for one regret very much—er—the position she's in." Of course, he added hastily, everyone thought Finland "should get out of the war," but he wondered what terms she was being offered by Russia. When I remarked that most commentators agreed they were very generous (Dorothy Thompson among others), he said, "Well, all I am saying is we should be frank with our people on foreign policy. How do we know what took place at Teheran? If these things were told us frankly, then there wouldn't be such animosity when some statement comes out in a Russian paper that shows us everything wasn't settled—"

The phone rang at this point, interrupting his absorption in his favorite topic. When he turned back to me, he was all radiance again. Bridges is a large, impressive man, with a fairly disarming smile. "You know," he said, "I'll bet you think of me as the most conservative sort of fellow, but I used to be thought of as quite a radical. When I ran for governor they held two things against me: one, I was too young, and the other, too radical. I had come out against holding companies." He beamed. Reminded chaffingly that he was said to have changed his name from H. Styles to Styles because he was occasionally confused with Harry Bridges, the labor leader, he said that that was not the only reason he had changed his name.

Senator Eugene Millikin of Colorado checked over all the names in the committee and came out with two who weren't isolationists—Bridges and White. But he described himself as a "middle-of-the-roader." And he does represent the run-of-the-mill Republicans. A big, easy-going, mostly bald man, known for his long, ponderous statements on the floor of the Senate, he echoed the line about how no one could read the minds of "Uncle Joe, Churchill, or FDR." He spoke about Italy, the western borders of Russia, Estonia, Latvia, and threw in France. What was our foreign policy? "Everyone is agreed we should collaborate with other countries after the war," he said, clacking his teeth in a broad smile. "The question is, how much?" Economic stabilization was just as simple, and Millikin just as profound on the subject. "There are adjustments that should be made," he said, "and when the bill comes up we'll have to see to that. And if that makes for a mild raise in the general price level—well, we've had some—and it's not dangerous. It doesn't mean we'll have inflation."

On the recent Republican victory in a special election in Colorado, he said with satisfaction: "We just had one program—beat FDR. Just one—do away with the New Deal."

"But won't the Republicans nationally have to get something a little more positive than that?" Blandly thoughtful, he replied: "Why, yes; yes, I think they will." But that was all. No suggestions.

Sen. Kenneth Wherry, a big, hearty Nebraskan, who fills the seat once occupied by the veteran and liberal George Norris, said at once that foreign policy was by far the most important issue facing Congress. He didn't want to be known as an isolationist, because he wasn't, he said. He would have voted for war if he'd been in the Senate after Pearl Harbor. This in Wherry's eyes seemed to settle everything. "Just say I think it would help our morale if we could have a statement of what our foreign policy is," he said. (This was just before Secretary of State Hull reiterated our foreign policy in a seventeen-point statement.) At one point I asked Wherry, "If you knew there was an organized movement through the country waiting for the appointed moment when the big casualty lists were coming in, before they came out openly for a negotiated peace, would you be for it or against it?"

"I wouldn't want to say I was for it or against it," he said. "I'm not for any negotiated peace on an appeasement basis, but what I do say is that if this administration had a foreign policy, we might be able to put an end to this war."

At one point this big man of the West demanded to know if I read the Bible. Did I know the Bible prophesied that there would always be wars?

On the domestic front he had much to say, all of which is implied in one remark of his: "It is foolish to maintain we can always hold the line as of September 1942."

Stripped of the suavity of Bridges, the pleasant banality of Millikin, the boudoir eyes of Brooks and the breeziness of Wherry, however, the anonymous interview I had with one member of the committee stands out as the real tip-off to what the Republicans are up to. At one point he raised his voice in almost a shout, saying, "What is it we're fighting for? Just what the hell are we fighting for, will you tell me that?"

When I answered I thought we were fighting for the very preservation of our national existence, he snorted: "Try telling that to some soldiers. Or to the boy who was in my office the other day, on his way to die on the Western Front. Why are we putting out boys on the Western Front?" When he began on Russia, and demanded to know what I thought about her "deals," I said as long as the Russians were killing Nazis at the rate they were, nothing seemed worthy of doubt. "How far are we going to let Russia go, though?" he asked. The Moscow pact was "nothing but the Mackinac resolution," and Teheran was "nothing—what is it?" But for England he reserved his most bitter ire. The thought of the foreign trade lying around made him almost ill. We should get into it right away, before England got a stranglehold. We had supremacy of the air, we should keep it; and of the seas. "I'm not on the Foreign Relations Committee, but I wish I were," he said. "That South Pacific! That rubber! What opportunities!" I murmured that there ought to be plenty of trade for all after the war, and that Teheran made it possible for the nations to sit down and discuss it and avoid cutthroat imperialist competition. "Oh-ho, so you want to head down the cartel road, sister?" he shouted boisterously. "Well, little lady, if I had the say-so, I'd be mighty selfish with Uncle Sam's interests." At the end of the interview, he called me back and asked me suspiciously if I were English. "Huh," he grunted after hearing my explanations, "sounds more like an English than an Arkansas accent to me!"

I came away feeling that if only the American people knew what these men who control the Republican Party were like, there would be no need to worry about the election or the future of America. But the Republican leaders are doing all they can to obscure the truth, and they take care to load the dice by depriving millions of Americans in the armed forces of the franchise. Yet the very fact that these men and their poll-tax Democratic colleagues behaved as they did on the soldiers' vote bill reveals their fear. Between now and November the handwriting on the wall can be written so large that there will be no doubt that our country will meet its responsibilities to the full.